

# Strategy Research Project

## Sustaining Foreign Language and Cultural Competence Among U.S. Army Officers

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2012

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 24-04-2012		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  Sustaining Foreign Language and Cultural Competence Among U.S. Army Officers				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)  LTC David Jewell				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  Dr. Adam L. Silverman Command Culture and Language Advisor				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution: A					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The Army should adopt policies and programs to establish and require cultural and foreign language proficiency among the general purpose force to achieve the objectives of the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy. The commissioned officer community offers the best target for initial implementation of programs due to its educational pre-requisites and the relatively smaller size of the community compared to all general purpose forces. Aggressive measures to begin developing cultural and foreign language competencies during pre-commissioning and sustaining them throughout career development and pre-deployment paths will offer the best opportunity to transform the Army's culture to one that values cultural and foreign language proficiency as importantly as more traditional combat skills. .					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Leader Development, Education, Training, ILR Scale, Professional Military Education, Army Leader Development Strategy, Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES  38	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**SUSTAINING FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG U.S.  
ARMY OFFICERS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

**AUTHOR:** Lieutenant Colonel David Jewell

**TITLE:** Sustaining Foreign Language and Cultural Competence Among U.S. Army Officers

**FORMAT:** Strategy Research Project

**DATE:** 17 April 2012      **WORD COUNT:** 7,247      **PAGES:** 38

**KEY TERMS:** Leader Development, Education, Training, ILR Scale, Professional Military Education, Army Leader Development Strategy, Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy

**CLASSIFICATION:** Unclassified

The Army should adopt policies and programs to establish and require cultural and foreign language proficiency among the general purpose force to achieve the objectives of the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy. The commissioned officer community offers the best target for initial implementation of programs due to its educational pre-requisites and the relatively smaller size of the community compared to all general purpose forces. Aggressive measures to begin developing cultural and foreign language competencies during pre-commissioning and sustaining them throughout career development and pre-deployment paths will offer the best opportunity to transform the Army's culture to one that values cultural and foreign language proficiency as importantly as more traditional combat skills.





## SUSTAINING FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY AMONG U.S ARMY OFFICERS

The Army and the United States' senior-most leadership have recognized the value and necessity of enhancing and sustaining cultural and foreign language skills among our soldiers. President Obama clearly articulated this idea in his August 2009 speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars by stating, “. . . in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, military strength will be measured not only by the weapons our troops carry, but by the languages they speak and the cultures they understand.”<sup>1</sup> In its Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS), a key strategy supporting the Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) and the Army Training Strategy, the Army built a “holistic strategy for present and future culture and foreign language education and training programs needed to close the gap in capabilities.”<sup>2</sup> The ACFLS identifies the two key elements of that gap as “limited understanding of how culture considerations influence the planning and execution of operations”<sup>3</sup> and “insufficient foreign language capability across the Army, which limits the effectiveness of both units and individual leaders and soldiers.”<sup>4</sup> Coupling this senior and institutional level commitment with a broad understanding of the importance of culture and foreign language skills among a force populated by soldiers with over a decade of experience operating in complicated combat, counter terrorism, stability, and counter insurgency environments in diverse global environments presents a substantial opportunity for the Army to implement programs necessary to produce and sustain culture and foreign language skills.

Many of our soldiers believe they need these skills, and that dynamic may reduce any resistance among the population to changes in education and training regimes. However, the challenges of declining budgets and the expense in time and money necessary to promote foreign language and cultural skills on a broad scale present a challenge to implementing the programs necessary to realize the aims of the ACFLS. Another challenge is the time needed to implement these changes. The task of acquiring and sustaining foreign language skills requires very large investments of money, time, and an individual's effort. To develop cultural competencies, individuals and the Army must invest in career-long adult education throughout an officer's career. As the Army draws down major operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, that receptiveness among the institutional Army force for change is likely to diminish as soldiers with the operational experience that proves the necessity of these skills leave the force. Likewise, the urgency for committing resources to remedy the gaps the ACFLS identifies may have already begun to wane among lawmakers on whom the Army depends for resources to educate, train, and sustain skills among the force.

These challenges, however, also present some opportunities. Increased time in garrison provides the Army the opportunity to adapt the ACFLS to take advantage of some of this dwell time to inject culture and language education into fundamental and routine Army training. If the Army succeeds at regionally aligning units to specific parts of the world, then the advantage of committing substantial garrison training time to more focused culture and language education will become even more evident as not just beneficial, but necessary, to soldiers and leaders at all levels. Increased emphasis on peacetime partnerships with foreign military forces and frequency of stability and

training opportunities for units in support of Regional Combatant Command Theater Strategic Plan objectives will also provide important opportunities for the conduct of cultural and foreign language education. A sustained improved capability of Army forces to support theater strategies provided by increasingly culture and foreign language competent soldiers will achieve the crucial effect of improving mission success for the Army and Combatant Commands even in peacetime.

In this paper I recommend that the Army pursue an approach that implements programs for the education and training of soldiers as well as for the accession, retention, promotion, and assignment of soldiers that codify specific foreign language and culture requirements. The Army should also adopt leader development and professionalism promotion approaches that effect a cultural change within the Army. Essentially, for the ACFLS to achieve sustained success, the Army should inculcate among soldiers a commitment to required levels of foreign language and cultural understanding on par with the commitment the Army demands to physical fitness and marksmanship.

The purpose and scope of this paper focuses on achieving this aim among commissioned officers in the Army's General Purpose Forces (GPF). The reasons for doing so follow from a few key assumptions. First, in this paper I will not attempt to usurp the massive task of implementing the AFLCS Army-wide. Doing so requires a much broader approach than addressing one segment of the population, and Army efforts are progressing under the auspices of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). I also do not intend to critique those efforts, but may add useful recommendations the Army can implement sooner and sustain at a relatively lower cost.

My second assumption builds upon the increased educational requirements the Army already places on commissioned officers compared to other populations.

Commissioned officers must already secure bachelor's degrees, and that suggests commissioned officers are likely to possess the academic skills to tackle the challenging subjects and commitment to study foreign languages and cultural understanding demand. Finally, my analysis and argument draws from the roles officers should and do play across the Army. As leaders and staff officers in units of all sizes charged with accomplishing tactical, operational, and strategic missions, officers work with soldiers every day. Just as officers model other forms of professionalism, officers in whom the Army can promote foreign language and cultural skills are likely to model this example for their subordinates and peers. This key aspect of leadership and professionalism can produce a greater readiness among the broader force to improve foreign language and culture competence by empowering leaders to motivate others better while accepting the costs in time and resources necessary to sustain these skills in their organizations.

The Army has already begun major investments and commenced several programs to begin achieving the goals of the ACFLS. The degrees of success each of these has achieved vary, and this paper does not intend to critique them. It is instructive though to briefly review what some of these key implementation initiatives include according to the 2012 Army Posture Statement. The Army has incorporated cultural lessons into Basic Officer Leadership Courses (BOLC). U.S. Military Academy Cadets now all receive at least two semesters of foreign language training. U.S. Army Cadet Command provides the Culture and Foreign Language Incentive Pay – Bonus to many cadets for studying foreign languages and culture in many strategic language areas.

Hundreds of cadets each year also deploy to culture and language immersion opportunities supporting Army Security Cooperation with partner nations. TRADOC has established an enterprise of highly skilled culture and foreign language advisors in each Army institution providing Professional Military Education. The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLI-FLC) provides culturally-based language familiarization training for deploying units, created 80-100 hour “HeadStart2” self-study language training products in eleven languages available via the DLIFLC.edu website and the Army Leader Management System (ALMS), and established Language Training Detachments at major Army installations where brigade combat teams are preparing to deploy<sup>5</sup>. These and more programs represent significant investments and have received positive feedback from units and individuals who have experienced the benefits they provide. This paper intends to suggest some additional or enhanced approaches the Army should apply to achieving the goals of the ACFLS among officers.

The scope of this paper also focuses on the category of soldiers the ACFLS identifies as “non-professional” practitioners of culture and foreign language skills including “culture generalists” and “foreign language non-professionals”.<sup>6</sup> Culture and foreign language professionals in the Army’s intelligence, Special Operations, Civil Affairs, and Foreign Area Officer corps require specific levels of expertise that depend on substantially greater commitments of resources and substantially more detailed career management programs. Likewise, the details of regionally aligning soldiers so that their assignments and careers match language and specific cultural competencies are beyond the scope of this paper. Tailoring specific language and cultural education to

match regional assignment provides many advantages and efforts to do so should in no way contradict any suggestions contained in this paper.

### Measuring Competence Levels

To achieve the ACFLS goal of “all leaders and soldiers to achieve some level of proficiency in both culture and foreign language for some portion of the world”<sup>7</sup> requires reliable measures of proficiency and competence. Measuring cultural proficiency presents the challenge of selecting instruments by which to measure knowledge of subjects that are in many ways subjective in nature. Despite this challenge, the Army needs a way to measure and record proficiency to implement this information in making wise assignment, promotion, and continuing education decisions. A measurement model similar to existing and accepted models would serve to smooth the transition to requiring certain levels of cultural competence among soldiers. For decades, the U.S. government has accepted and used what is now a mature framework for measuring foreign language proficiency it should continue to use, while seeking a similar framework for cultural proficiency.

For foreign language proficiency the Department of Defense and the Army already use the scale identified as by the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR). The ILR scale measures proficiency in reading, speaking, listening, writing, translation, and interpretation of a specific foreign language. The scales for each element range from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (functionally native or master proficiency).<sup>8</sup> The Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) is the tool the Army and Department of Defense use to measure individuals’ proficiency. DLPT tests undergo substantial academic review and certification and test materials require official protection and control to ensure the integrity of the testing regime. The DLPT process is sufficient to measure and record

foreign language proficiency for soldiers. Efforts to refine and produce tests that accurately measure lower proficiency levels in many languages will be necessary to effectively measure skills in foreign language non-professionals, but the system should be capable of doing so with the commitment of adequate resources. The Army should sustain the DLPT as the measure of foreign language proficiency.

By adopting a framework similar to the ILR and DLPT for measuring cultural competency, the Army can benefit from a useful level of rigor and familiarity with the system currently applied to foreign language proficiency. Measuring cultural competency does not have an accepted program with the maturity of the ILR and DLPT regimes. Developing such a program, preferably with scales similar to the ILR scale, will be necessary to ensure the Army can manage individual competency in a controlled, rigorous, and reliable manner. Academic professionals are likely the best source for developing such a scale and testing regime. It is beyond the scope of this paper and the expertise of the author to propose details regarding the development of a cultural competence testing regime. To a large extent, the Army will have to rely on the subjective assessment of subordinates by their leaders until an adequate testing regime emerges. Among commissioned officers, a subjective assessment of skills and leader attributes is a central part of the performance evaluation system. Adding a requirement for such an assessment of cultural competence under the auspices of the ALDS would serve the interim need of making cultural competence something officers value as necessary to their careers.

Efforts to describe a rigorous and useful measurement framework for cultural competency do exist among communities with which the Army and Department of

Defense have established relationships. One such effort the Army should pursue is a detailed Skill Level Descriptions for intercultural communications that resemble the ILR scale in format that a special committee from the Interagency Language Roundtable presented during the November 2011 Annual Convention and World Languages Expo of the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages. These descriptions integrate some foreign language competencies, but focus on the cultural understanding aspects of range of context, awareness of cultural differences, performing tasks and functions, culturally appropriate behavior, dealing with taboos, and literacy. The presented Skill Level Descriptions are intended to serve “primarily as guidelines for use in government settings.”<sup>9</sup> Originating from an ILR committee, the Skill Level Descriptions assume that “a given level of competence in Intercultural Communication require a corresponding level in language proficiency. But language proficiency and cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities do not always align.”<sup>10</sup> The Skill Level Descriptions are also generic and will require “culture-specific models [to be] developed for assessment and instructional purposes.”<sup>11</sup> While not perfect, these Skill Level Descriptions present an adequately detailed system to measure cultural competency with a useful familiar format that is already established in the ILR scale for foreign language proficiency. It provides a useful model upon which the Army can build a system for measuring cultural competence along with foreign language competence, that may likely remain in concert with Department of Defense, other governmental, and academic initiatives.



The tables below extract and summarize the ILR scale and the Intercultural Communication Skill Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication.

ILR Scale	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Translation	Interpretation
0	No Proficiency				No Performance	No Performance
0+	Memorized Proficiency				Minimal Performance	Memorized Performance
1	Elementary Proficiency				Minimal Performance	Minimal Performance, +
1+	Elementary Proficiency, Plus				Minimal Performance	Minimal Performance, +
2	Limited Working Proficiency				Limited Performance	Limited Working Performance
2+	Limited Working Proficiency, Plus				Limited Performance	Limited Working Performance, +
3	General Professional Proficiency				Professional Performance	Professional Performance
3+	General Professional Proficiency, Plus				Professional Performance	Professional Performance, +
4	Advanced Professional Proficiency				Professional Performance	Advanced Professional Performance
4+	Advanced Professional Proficiency				Professional Performance	Advance Professional Performance, +
5	Functionally Native Proficiency				Professional Performance	Master Performance
	Source: ILR Website: <a href="http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm">http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm</a>					

Figure 1: ILR Scale Descriptions<sup>12</sup>

The ILR posted a draft of a less detailed list of Skill Level Descriptions for Competence in Intercultural Communication in April 2011 with broad levels and omitting the detailed subordinate factors that align with the “General Level” in the table above. While the detailed factor descriptions may be useful in developing curricula for both acquisition of cultural skills, this paper will proceed to discuss cultural competency using these more general descriptions.

Inter-Cultural Skill Level	General Level	Contexts	Cultural Differences	Tasks & Functions	Appropriate Behavior	Taboos	Literacy
0	No Competence	No Competence	little or no awareness that differences exist	No Competence	Unable to adjust when faced with cultural differences	No reference	No reference
0+	Memorized Competence	a few routine interactions serving basic survival needs	awareness of obvious differences, may often miss cues	Greetings, farewells, thanks, and apology	Able to use rehearsed behavior and memorized utterances	avoids some of most critical and noticeable taboos, although not consistently	NA
1	Elementary Competence	able to participate in some everyday interactions	recognizes differences, but shows little understanding of significance	typically experiences difficulties with less predictable and spontaneous interactions, normally observes basic courtesy requirements	usually responds appropriately to the most commonly used cultural cues, can generally conform to culturally prescribed practices	avoids well-known taboo topics and behavior	exhibits emerging ability to participate in some social media activities
2	Limited Working Competence	able to participate acceptable in many everyday social and working interactions	conscious awareness of significant differences, may sometimes misinterpret cues	typically adheres to basic social norms, may be able to address some job-related problems	able to participate acceptably in many everyday social and work-related interactions	can typically avoid taboos	able to participate in various social media activities
3	Professional Competence	able to participate successfully in most social, practical, and professional interactions	rarely misreads cultural cues, almost always able to repair misinterpretations	can interact appropriately during meetings and provide detailed explanations	able to participate acceptably in many everyday social and work-related interactions	controls nonverbal responses and handles unfamiliar situations appropriately	can interpret reading materials and recognize subtleties, implications, and tone and able to communicate via social media
4	Advanced Professional Competence	controls the full range of formal and informal styles of language and behavior	almost always correctly interprets visual cues, cultural allusions, nuance, tone, and subtle manifestations of underlying values	can employ sophisticated communicative strategies to command, argue, persuade, negotiate, counsel, and show empathy	able to participate successfully in virtually all social, professional and official interactions	can effectively employ a wide variety of sophisticated communicative strategies to command, argue, persuade, dissuade, negotiate, counsel and show empathy	can effectively employ a wide variety of sophisticated communicative strategies
5	Superior Professional Competence	mastered and controls virtually all forms of intercultural communication	able to analyze, debate, and synthesize the most creative expressions, concepts, values, and standards that underpin the culture	able to analyze, debate and synthesize aesthetic qualities and ideas expressed in the arts and standards that underpin the culture	NA	NA	able to analyze, debate, and synthesize the most creative expressions of language and aesthetics
Source: The New ILR Skill- Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication, 19 November 2011, via <a href="http://www.govtilr.org">www.govtilr.org</a>							

Figure 2: Intercultural Skill Level Descriptions<sup>13</sup>

Taken together, the ILR scale and the Intercultural Communication Skill Level Descriptions comprise an adequate format for how the Army should proceed in measuring the effectiveness of foreign language and cultural skills in and among officers in the General Purpose Force.

### Setting Competency Standards

The ACFLS emphasizes that “culture and foreign language competence is an underpinning that is essential to the effective use of . . .” competencies for the application of combat power, understanding governance, economic and infrastructure development, and negotiation and mediation skills necessary “to develop and maintain expeditionary forces led by soldiers who are ready to deploy and operate effectively anywhere in the world across the full spectrum of conflict”.<sup>14</sup> Essential to achieving this effect is a process of defining and promulgating standards the Army will require individuals and units to achieve and sustain along with the tools to measure achievement of these standards. Individual standards apply along both the career-development path and the pre-deployment path, while unit standards will generally apply only to the pre-deployment path. The success of individual officers sustaining proficiency along their career-development paths will positively influence unit proficiency. Officers’ competency levels will inform how these leaders design and take advantage of pre-deployment training opportunities for cultural and foreign language education to increase unit awareness, understanding, and competency. Addressing the specific aspects of developing unit cultural and foreign language capabilities within ARFORGEN would be a valuable study TRADOC should consider approaching or commissioning as the ACFLS continues to mature. The ACFLS further defines culture as “the set of distinctive features of a society or group, including but not limited to

values, beliefs, and norms, that ties together members of that society or group and that drives actions and behaviors.”<sup>15</sup> Achieving cultural competence at whatever level, therefore, includes both learning about culture and gaining the knowledge, skills, and attributes for understanding and interacting within different cultures.

To further refine the Army’s approaches to achieving and sustaining foreign language and cultural competency, the ACFLS prescribes the development of foreign language and cultural capability along the two distinct, but interrelated paths of career development and pre-deployment.<sup>16</sup> The career development path lays the foundation for lifelong learning and foreign language and cultural competencies necessary for enduring readiness across the force and upon which specific levels of capabilities in units and individuals in preparation for specific deployments and operations.

“Consequently, each path is guided by and directly supports respectively the Army Leader Development Strategy and the Army Training Concept.”<sup>17</sup>

To discuss setting standards along the culture and foreign language axes the ACFLS describes, this paper will adopt the four stages of the career development path<sup>18</sup> along with Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) stages and individual and leader objectives described in the ACFLS<sup>19</sup>. However, the discussion that follows will nest compatible objectives described in the ACFLS within the ILR and Skill Level Descriptions discussed above. The four stages of the career development path for officers include<sup>20</sup>:

Stage 1 includes the period from Pre-commissioning through completion of Initial Military Training (IMT) courses including Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC) I and BOLC II-III.

Stage 2 includes the period of time from the end of IMT through the end of the seventh year of active service including completion of the Captain's Career Course (CCC).

Stage 3 includes the period of time from the beginning of the eighth year of active service or completion of the CCC through the end of the sixteenth year or completion of Intermediate Level Education (ILE).

Stage 4 encompasses the period of time beginning with the seventeenth year of service or completion of ILE through the end of the officer's career and includes such Professional Military Education courses as the senior service college (SSC).

The process of managing increased cultural and foreign language awareness, understanding, and competence along the pre-deployment path will vary from unit to unit and mission to mission to mission. Individuals with broad general understanding and advanced regional competence in the region to which the unit will deploy will more likely be able to contribute to more advanced levels of competency in those units. If, under an Army construct of Regionally Aligned Forces, individuals and units will have the advantage of working with a specific region's culture and language contexts while preparing for deployments. Regardless of the broader construct the focus of the pre-deployment path should follow similar requirements as expressed for other critical operational skills in the ARFORGEN process. ARFORGEN includes the three stages of reset, train/ready, and available. These stages frame the process of developing and sustaining cultural and language capabilities in officers during the pre-deployment path segments they will encounter along their career-development path.

For career development path culture competencies among officers, the Army must accept that it is expensive to achieve the goals of the ACFLS. Foreign language acquisition is substantially more costly in terms of the money and time required for good professional training, but substantial investments of time and effort are also necessary for individuals to achieve and sustain cultural competence. Officers require academic study in civilian and PME environments, personal commitment to self-study as adult learners, and experience garnered by assignments in varied cultural contexts. By including serious pre-commissioning standards for cultural education and assigning officers to duties demanding increasingly advanced cultural competency, the Army can maximize the value of its investments supporting the ACFLS. Understanding about cultures in general and understanding a sufficient degree about specific cultures both contribute to developing and sustaining cultural competence among officers. Service as an Army officer requires understanding of various cultures within the United States, the United States' government, and the national security community and interagency as well as understanding of foreign cultures since officers throughout their careers will operate among cultures different from their native one. Academic exposure to theories of culture along with survey instruction about cultures contributes to this understanding. However direct exposure and experiences with varied cultures are essential for officers to gain increasingly sophisticated cultural competency.

Foreign language competency requires substantial individual investment of time and study, spurred by genuine motivation, and enhanced by experience interacting in foreign language environments. Rare is the individual who can rapidly acquire multiple foreign language competencies, so investments in the study of particular languages for

individuals are the most efficient. A 2011 academic study reinforces a commonly held belief among foreign language educators that the successful learning of one foreign language, substantially improves an individual's capability to acquire some degree of proficiency in other foreign languages<sup>21</sup>. Early and accurate identification and education in a particular foreign language native to a region in which an Army officer will serve and operate for most of his or her career would be very beneficial. However, even if early identification of a career-long regional focus does not materialize, maintenance of foreign language proficiency augments an officer's ability to increase cultural competence<sup>22</sup> while possibly enhancing the adaptability of acquiring some degree of proficiency in an additional language during pre-deployment stages.

Consistent with the culture major subject areas by cohort delineation described in Annex 2 to Appendix C of the ACFLS and culture major objectives by stage described in Annex 3 to Appendix C of the ACFLS the Intercultural ILR Skill Level Descriptions could measure the following array of standards the Army should require of officers.<sup>23</sup> For stage 1, the ACFLS seeks for officers to "build a foundation of cross-cultural competence (3C) that ensures effectiveness in basic cross-cultural situations at platoon level,"<sup>24</sup> begin to build a foundation in regional competence, and develop the tools to attain cultural awareness. The target Intercultural Skill Level scale of 1 would be appropriate in which the officer is able to participate in some everyday interactions, recognize cultural differences but not necessarily understand their significance, normally observes basic courtesy requirements, avoids well-known taboo topics, and usually responds appropriately to most commonly used cultural cues. Officers should demonstrate this skill level as they encounter varied cultures represented in early Army

experiences and recognize the general factors that may shape their interactions in a particular foreign culture. This skill level provides a foundation upon which the officer can build more sophisticated cultural skills for a particular culture and a readiness to evaluate new cultures (either organizationally or regionally) and acquire a basic degree of rudimentary 3C.

For stage 2, the ACFLS seeks for officers to steadily expand regional competence knowledge, skills and attributes while sustaining and improving general 3C capabilities. The focus of expanding knowledge will focus on building effectiveness in more complex cross-cultural situations at the company and battalion levels.<sup>25</sup> At these levels, the Army's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that routine leader interactions in a foreign culture are more prevalent and include some degree of negotiation and mediation with local leaders, leaders in coalition militaries, and often with other interagency partners and non-governmental organizations. The target Intercultural Skill Level scale appropriate for this level should be a minimum of 2. A limited working competence provides the officer the ability to participate acceptably in many working interactions, be consciously aware of significant differences while typically adhering to basic social norms and avoiding taboos. Ideally, officers would progress to an Intercultural Skill Level scale of 3, professional competence, during this stage and should be able to do so when afforded sufficient opportunities to operate within foreign cultures.

For stage 3, the ACFLS seeks officers able to operate effectively with sophistication in cross-cultural situations at the battalion and brigade levels as well as understand cultural factors necessary to function on division or higher level staffs.



Cultural understanding and regional competence are necessary at this level while the Army should require these field grade officers to continue building 3C capacity both in them and within their units<sup>26</sup>. The target Intercultural Skill Level of 3, professional competence should be the minimum requirement during stage 3. Officers capable of elevating their skill level to 4 during this stage should benefit in terms of positive performance evaluations that identify progress towards advanced professional competence as valuable for further advancement. The abilities to participate successfully in most social and professional interactions including during meetings and to handle unfamiliar situations appropriately are essential for field grade officers who will often encounter relatively senior local officials, senior officials from other U.S. services and agencies, and members of the media. Sufficient cultural competence in stage 3 officers will often enable leaders and organizations to recognize and take advantage of opportunities varied cultural contexts present. Insufficient cultural competence may contribute not only to missed opportunities for tactical, operational, or strategic success but may complicate challenges to successful mission accomplishment.

Stage 4 officers require 3C knowledge and regional competence knowledge, skills, and attributes to ensure effectiveness in highly nuanced cross-cultural situations at the brigade and higher levels of interaction. Leaders at this level require 3C competence and specific regional understanding for environments in which they operate to persuade leaders from different cultural environments while communicating respect and empathy. These leaders must also model and promote cultural competencies for their subordinates, peers, and organizations to strengthen broader effectiveness in all activities. Intercultural Skill Level 4, advanced professional competence, should be the

minimum requirement for stage 4 officers. Attaining Skill Level 5, superior professional competence, should be necessary for further advancement and assignments to key strategic positions of responsibility. The ability to argue, persuade, negotiate and counsel while correctly interpreting the majority of cultural cues, allusions, nuances, and subtle manifestations of another culture's underlying values are essential among the Army's senior leaders.

Foreign language competency may not require advancement to the degree necessary for cultural competences along the career development path. Culturally based foreign language education and sustainment will almost always enhance cultural competencies within the particular culture to which a language is native, but officers can acquire and sustain substantial cultural understanding as described above with much more rudimentary foreign language understanding. The ACFLS organizes the foreign language axis along the career development path into foreign language competence and use of language tool components<sup>27</sup>. For the purpose of this paper, the ability to effectively access, use, and make available to their units foreign language tools should be an essential element of professional competence all officers develop and sustain. Professional Military Education and unit training programs should include exposure and practice in the effective use of interpreters and translators, appropriate automated translation devices, and the use of other means of non-verbal communication. Officers should also develop and sustain knowledge of how to access language training resources such as Field Support Guides, Language Survival Kits, and resources available at language training detachments and educational sources at unit garrison and

deployed locations. The scope and focus below is on the development and sustainment of foreign language competence and standards expressed in terms of the ILR scale.

The ACFLS describes foreign language competence as “a demonstrated level of proficiency in a foreign language” including acquisition through the receipt of “structured instruction.”<sup>28</sup> The proposed requirements for stages along the career development path below intend to express the ACFLS Foreign Language Major Objectives by Stage described in Annex 3 to Appendix D in the ACFLS in terms of appropriate ILR scale measures. Of note, the ILR scale includes measures for reading, speaking, listening, writing, translation, and interpretation. All of these factors do not necessarily require the establishment of standards the Army requires general purpose force officers to achieve and sustain. For example, among language professionals, the Army routinely records and awards incentives based primarily on the reading and listening factors while measuring the speaking factor<sup>29</sup>. The demands for operating within a foreign language environment for general purpose force officers will most likely place the highest demands upon listening and speaking proficiency. Reading proficiency remains important but generally to understand such items as signage and perhaps headlines and main ideas in public and social media. Writing, while very beneficial to leaders interacting within foreign language environments, is a task officers may often be able to assign to foreign language professionals available to them. Reading and translation proficiency will help leaders quality control the work of foreign language professionals supporting them and would definitely assist in performing triage for such functions and document and media exploitation. Interpretation should follow at some level from the other factors, but is difficult to measure routinely and investments in broad approaches

to measuring interpretation may not prove cost-effective to the Army among language non-professionals.

The ACFLS describes stage 1 objectives as learning a limited set of vocabulary and phrases in a foreign language while developing confidence in learning and applying language skills. This description would place the minimum standard requirement for this stage at the 0+, memorized proficiency, level of the ILR scale. However, the Army should adopt a more ambitious standard for commissioned officers at this stage than for enlisted personnel or warrant officers. This paper will discuss a key opportunity to require a degree of foreign language competence available in the pre-commissioning education requirements for officers in a subsequent section. ILR scale level 1+, elementary proficiency plus, should be the standard for officers entering service. The ILR scale describes this level for listening, for example, as “sufficient comprehension to understand short conversations about all survival needs and limited social demands.”<sup>30</sup> Successful completion of a good college-level foreign language program will generate this level of competence in most motivated students and the incentive of their commission requiring this level of proficiency is likely to enhance the enthusiasm among prospective officers to attain this level of proficiency.

Stage 2 ACLFS objectives include increased vocabulary and grammar knowledge in a foreign language and increased confidence in learning and applying language skills<sup>31</sup>. Given the relative nature of this objective compared to stage 1 ILR scale level 2 will establish a reasonable requirement for this stage. Given access to improvement and sustainment tools through academic and Army provided tools, officers will incorporate necessary efforts to develop increased skills in their language. ILR scale

level 2's limited working proficiency provides the capability to "satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements".<sup>32</sup> This level of proficiency will enable officers to interact in their foreign language at many interactions encountered at the company level while increasing their ability to employ foreign language professionals who may be supporting their activities. For comparison to current standards for Army foreign language professionals, the Army currently requires foreign language basic course graduates to achieve and sustain ILR scale proficiency of 2 for reading and listening<sup>33</sup>.

For stages 3 and 4, the ACLFS seeks officers to build on knowledge of foreign language, reinforce previous knowledge, and promote the value of foreign language capability as an important resource for the Army<sup>34</sup>. At this point in an officer's career the Army should encourage measurable increases in foreign language proficiency but should require sustainment of the ILR scale proficiency of 2 for reading, listening, and speaking. Incentives for higher levels can be useful for promoting improvement, but sustaining this level of proficiency should receive the same degree of emphasis as the Army places on physical fitness. For example, failure to maintain a level 2 for reading and listening measured by a DLPT may be sufficient to prevent an officer from promoting to lieutenant colonel.

The pre-deployment path for officers described in the ACFLS focuses on the reset and train/ready phases of ARFORGEN with specific major objectives while leaders will sustain culture and foreign language knowledge, skills, and attributed during the available phase. Leaders should become able to guide and integrate cultural and language capability within the unit to accomplish the assigned mission and effectively interact across cultural boundaries.<sup>35</sup> For officers who sustain the required levels of

foreign language and cultural proficiencies consistent with the career development path, achieving the pre-deployment objectives will be substantially easier than for leaders without this foundation. When the deployment for which a unit is preparing is consistent with a particular language or regional culture focus the officer has already developed, the opportunity exists for the officer to focus a greater proportion of his or own efforts to readying his or her unit for the deployment while honing culture and language skills in specific areas such as refining understanding of a particular foreign language dialect or building more understanding of cognate languages spoken in the region. The officer may also be able to conduct detailed study of historical and social factors specific to the precise location or community, and further enhance the readiness of the unit to achieve mission success. Measuring the standards for this situation should focus on ensuring the officer has the competence for foreign language and culture consistent with the requirements for career development path.

When the deployment for which the unit is preparing is outside the region or language for which the officer's career development path efforts have provided knowledge, skills, and attributes, the officer will still benefit from the general cultural and foreign language familiarity developed. In this situation, the goals for ILR scale and Intercultural Skill Level description scale levels should focus on understanding the regional culture and acquiring modest but beneficial foreign language skills. Essentially, for a foreign language in which the officer does not have a previous proficiency, ILR scale goals should be elementary proficiency (level 1) and the intercultural skill level goal should be a minimum of limited working competence.

The table below summarizes the discussion above to show the foreign language and cultural proficiency and competence levels the Army should require of commissioned officers for the career development and pre-deployment paths. For the pre-deployment path standards, the levels reflect those required of officers who do not already possess a career development path consistent with the specific region or language applicable to the area to which the unit will deploy.

	ILR - Language						Culture
Career Development Stage	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Translati on	Interpret ation	Intercultu ral Skill Level
1 - Recruit-IMT	1	1+	1+	0+	NA	NA	1
2 - IMT - CCC (0 - 7 yrs)	2	1+	2	(1)	(1)	(1)	2 (3)
3 - CCC - ILE (8 - 16 yrs)	2(2+)	2(2+)	2(2+)	1(1+)	(1)	(1)	3 (4)
4 - ILE - Retire (17+ yrs)	2(3)	2(3)	2(3)	1+(2)	(1+)	(1+)	4 (5)
(#) denotes levels the Army should encourage and provide incentives for, but not require							
Pre Deployment Stage							
Reset	0+	0+	0+	0+	NA	NA	1
Train/Ready	1	1	1	0+	NA	NA	2
Available	Sustain and improve with experience						
Levels above represent goals for officers who do not already demonstrate proficiency entering Reset							

Figure 3: Recommended Culture/Language Scale

### Competency Acquisition and Sustainment

TRADOC Operations Order 11-013 (TRADOC Implementation of the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy), 18 May 2011, established key guidance and direction for the integration of culture and culturally-based foreign language training education for the Army general purpose force<sup>36</sup>. This implementation order provides clarity on many levels regarding how TRADOC will leverage its resources to achieve the aims of the ACFLS. The recommendations provided below aim to be consistent with that guidance while offering some specific programs against which Army resource allocation can garner substantial efficiencies in a time of the constrained fiscal

environment the Army is likely to face. These recommendations proceed from the assumption that the Army will not receive sufficient resource authorizations to educate and train the general purpose force commissioned officer community through the expensive and time-consuming programs currently devoted to foreign language and cultural professionals such as the basic and advanced language programs offered by the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center and various fully-funded educational programs for serving officers as public and private universities and colleges. Another assumption underpinning these recommendations is that the Army will continue to seek and implement Army-run and partnership programs under TRADOC auspices to provide culture and foreign language advisors and instructors to support key Army populations in the general purpose forces such as cultural advisor programs at schools and major installations and foreign language training detachments.

The first major recommendation involves maximizing the leverage available in the college education of officers in the pre-commissioning period. Both Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and service academy programs already provide substantial advantages to citizens who aspire to serve as officers. While it may appear inconvenient or burdensome to officers who previously received commissions without additional requirements, as the Army seeks to build and sustain a dramatically more culturally and foreign language competent force it should now require officers to enter active service with as much foreign language and cultural capability as is practical. Much of the expense in time and money for acquiring awareness, understanding, and at least an apprentice level of proficiency can and should migrate to the pre-commissioning period.



Some approaches to achieving better cultural and foreign language proficiency during officers' pre-commissioning period have already begun and been the subject of interest from across the U.S. government. A 2008 U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, subcommittee for Oversight and Investigation report and a 2010 independent panel review of the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) recommended essentially that "[f]oreign language proficiency should be a requirement for commissioning from the [Reserve Officer Training Corps] ROTC and the service academies". The 2010 Oversight and Investigation subcommittee report cites that the Army implemented a program in 2009 that pays \$250 per semester hour for ROTC cadets who satisfactorily complete required coursework in qualifying strategic foreign language or associated cultural studies.<sup>37</sup> Rather than rely on incentives that meet with mixed results, the Army should require foreign language proficiency in at least a modern foreign language or specifically in a language the Army identifies as strategically important for officers as a condition of commissioning. This requirement would shift some of the cost of foreign language acquisition to civilian institutions and individuals desiring a commission. One measure would be successfully earning an ILR scale score of 1+ or higher in reading and listening for individuals who are either heritage speakers or who can demonstrate evidence of heritage speaking in their upbringing. In the absence of accurate lower level DLPT test instruments for particular languages, the Army could require potential officers to demonstrate successful completion of foreign language coursework up to the 300 level of undergraduate courses. 300 level courses typically include the study of "advanced" language in most accredited U.S. colleges and universities and likely approach at least 1+ reading and listening proficiency.

For cultural competency, the Army could determine a menu of acceptable college courses, in coordination with appropriate academic experts that would provide successful students at least a level 1 intercultural skill level as well as broad understanding of knowledge about culture. Some potential college courses that might fulfill this requirement include social anthropology, comparative sociology, comparative political science, comparative religion, or philosophy courses and non “western civilization” history survey courses.

The added course load for students would likely be minimal at most colleges and universities that require “core courses” including foreign language and social sciences regardless of a student’s major. While this approach will work well with ROTC and service academies, it would present a challenge for some Officer Candidate School individuals who have earned bachelor’s degrees over an extended period of time or from schools that did not require so broad a scope of core courses. However, the Army can approach the remedy to this challenge by requiring completion of these requirements during stage 1 of the career development path.

The keys to enabling officers to sustain their culture and foreign language skills lie in the emphasis leaders at all levels place on this effort and availability of affordable programs soldiers and leaders can access. Language learning tools, including resources at installation language learning facilities and partnerships with local academic institutions, can combine with distance learning initiatives the TRADOC ACFLS implementation order has directed development of to provide soldiers numerous sustainment opportunities.

Emphasis on developing and sustaining culture and foreign language proficiency from Army leaders at all levels is critical to inculcating the motivation to sustain these competencies and produce a general purpose force that values culture and foreign language proficiency as much as the Army insists they value and sustain physical fitness. Issuing officers commonly accepted cultural competence supporting literature to add to their personal libraries and requiring familiarity with these resources in unit professional development and leader development programs offers one approach that would not require large fiscal investments. The Army should identify and issue to officers a suitable textbook, ideally reinforced with online elements, to serve as a common basis for gaining, sustaining, and advancing cultural competencies. Professional Military Education and unit leader development programs should then include this resource as part of the career-development path for officers. Periodic updates to this resource and occasional replacements by improved resources would be elements of this approach the Army could manage centrally. If the resource contained region and culture specific cultural surveys, it could also serve as a useful tool even along the pre-deployment path and as officers advance to increasingly regionally focused cultural competency. One example of such a resource is Richard D. Lewis's book "When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures"<sup>38</sup> that offers a sophisticated and comprehensive survey of numerous cultural factors and a survey of cultural implications for most countries and regions of the world. While there may exist alternative or better resources, the inclusion of this reference in parts of the U.S. Army War College curriculum suggests it has achieved a substantial level of acceptance and utility.

## Incentive and Requirement Program Recommendations

Incentives may often motivate many officers to pursue professional developmental skills with the seriousness necessary to add value to their units and the Army. The Army should maximize financial incentives as well as provide advanced educational opportunities to deserving officers to further enhance their culture and foreign language proficiency. However, making the sustainment of required proficiency levels is more certain to ensure a change in the Army's culture to one that values culture and foreign language skills with the levels of commitment the ACLFS suggests is necessary.

To better track and manage officers' skills, the Army should adopt occupational specialty identifiers for officers who attain required levels of cultural and foreign language proficiency. These identifiers should play important roles in the assignment and promotion of officers to both maximize officers' opportunities to continue to enhance their knowledge, skills and attributes while affording the Army the opportunity to maximize the utility of these officers to units and organizations.

Performance evaluations should require comments or assessments of officers' cultural and foreign language competencies and their ongoing efforts to sustain and improve these competencies. Until approved testing regimes are developed to match the Army's requirements, subjective assessments rating officials can be useful. The Army should promulgate guidance for rating officials to consider when making these subjective assessments for both counseling and performance evaluation purposes. Including cultural and foreign language competencies in the menu of certifications for professionalism under the auspices of the ALDS or the Profession of Arms concept would prove another beneficial approach to stress the necessity of these skills

throughout officers' careers. Sustaining adequate cultural and foreign language competence should be accepted by the Army and soldiers as a necessary component of being a professional soldier.

Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus incentive payments will be useful as the Army transforms toward adopting culture and foreign language proficiency as a core competency. However, this paper proposes that proficiency bonus payments for required levels of proficiency phase out at the appropriate time. Proficiency bonus incentives should eventually become a reward for soldiers who exceed required levels of competency. Again, this mirrors the attitude toward physical fitness with which the Army is comfortable as a community in which meeting the standard requirement is a condition of service while exceeding it meets with both tangible and perceived rewards.

### Conclusions

As the Army proceeds on its approach to developing a general purpose force with sustainable cultural and foreign language capabilities needed for an effective expeditionary and full spectrum readiness, an immediate focus on promoting these competencies among the commissioned officer corps will provide substantial benefits. Developing clear and measurable standards such as those discussed above and implementing processes and programs that demand Soldiers achieve and sustain the levels of proficiency the Army deems necessary will enable the transformation to a general purpose force the ACFLS correctly envisions. As the Army draws down operations in current conflicts, the potential exists for leaders, soldiers, and the governmental agencies responsible for providing the Army critical readiness resources to forget the lessons over a decade of conflict in far off lands and distant cultures have made clear. The momentum to make hard choices now to require soldiers to achieve

and sustain cultural and foreign language proficiency continues for the time being, but hesitancy in implementing programs to capitalize on that momentum may cause both cultural receptiveness in the Army and willingness to resource the expenses to begin to wane.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> No author given, "Text: Obama's Address to Veterans," *New York Times*, August 17, 1009, online <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/18/us/politics/18obama.text.html?pagewanted=all>, (23 Jan 2012). No author cited in by-line

<sup>2</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Headquarters, Department of the Army G-2, *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS)*, Washington, DC, 1 December 2009. Army. Page ii, Executive Summary.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> No author given. *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS), White Paper for the 2012 Army Posture Statement*. 12 February 2012. (Washington, DC: US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC))[https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS\\_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305](https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305).

<sup>6</sup> ACFLS, Page iii, Executive Summary

<sup>7</sup> ACFLS, Page iii, Executive Summary

<sup>8</sup> [www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm](http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm), and supporting links from this page. Interagency Roundtable website. Copyright ILR – 2011. Accessed 25 Jan 2012.

<sup>9</sup> PowerPoint presentation: "The New ILR Skill-Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication", Annual Convention of World Languages Expo of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 19 November 2011. Interagency Language Roundtable Special Committee, online [www.govtilr.org](http://www.govtilr.org) 7 Feb 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> [www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm](http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm), and supporting links from this page. Interagency Roundtable website. Copyright ILR – 2011. Accessed 25 Jan 2012.

<sup>13</sup> PowerPoint presentation: "The New ILR Skill-Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication", Annual Convention of World Languages Expo of the American Council on the

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<sup>14</sup> No author given. *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS), White Paper for the 2012 Army Posture Statement*. 12 February 2012. (Washington, DC: US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC))[https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS\\_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305](https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Appendix D.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Appendix F.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8-9..

<sup>21</sup> Prof. Salim Abu-Rabia and Ekaterina Sanitsky, “*Speak a lot of languages – it’s easier*”, University of Haifa, 1 Feb 2001 online “<http://newmedia-eng.haifa.ac.il/?p=4493>” on 31 Jan 2012

<sup>22</sup> One, of many, examples of studies suggesting foreign language acquisition enhances cultural understanding appeared in the 2007 National Council of State Supervisors for Languages and National Education Association report of research findings, “The Benefits of Second Language Study. The study explicitly states, “The positive impact of cultural information is significantly enhanced when that information is experienced through foreign language and accompanied by experiences in culturally authentic situations.” Accessed via, <http://www.ncssfl.org/papers/BenefitsSecondLanguageStudyNEA.pdf> on 21 February 2012.

<sup>23</sup> The author acknowledges the subjective nature of the effort to define standards using the skill level description scale and reconciling the different terminology used in the ACFLS and the ILR skill level descriptions. The benefit of doing so will allow for an effective articulation of the measures in a manner that will allow concise recording in personnel and training records which will enable more efficient application of incentives and procedures for remediation approaches when officers fall short of periodic assessments of their cultural competency.

<sup>24</sup> No author given. *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS), White Paper for the 2012 Army Posture Statement*. 12 February 2012. (Washington, DC: US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC)) [https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS\\_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305](https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305). Appendix C, page 38.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Foreign Language Program*, Army regulation 11-6 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 31 August 2009), online [http://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/pdf/r11\\_6.pdf](http://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/pdf/r11_6.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> [www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm](http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm), and supporting links from this page. Interagency Roundtable website. Copyright ILR – 2011. Accessed 25 Jan 2012.

<sup>31</sup> No author given. *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS), White Paper for the 2012 Army Posture Statement*. 12 February 2012. (Washington, DC: US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) [https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS\\_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305](https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305). Page 65

<sup>32</sup> [www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm](http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm), and supporting links from this page. Interagency Roundtable website. Copyright ILR – 2011. Accessed 25 Jan 2012.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Foreign Language Program*, Army regulation 11-6 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 31 August 2009), online [http://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/pdf/r11\\_6.pdf](http://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/pdf/r11_6.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> No author given. *Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy (ACFLS), White Paper for the 2012 Army Posture Statement*. 12 February 2012. (Washington, DC: US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) [https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS\\_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305](https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/VDAS_ArmyPostureStatement/2012/InformationPapers/ViewPaper.aspx?id=305). Page 65.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>36</sup> GEN Cone, Commander, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, “Operations Order 11-013 (TRADOC Implementation of the Army Culture and Foreign Language Strategy)”, Fort Monroe, VA. 18 May 2011

<sup>37</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations 2010 Report, “Building Language Skills and Cultural Competencies in the Military: Bridging the Gap”, December 2010, pages 16-18.

<sup>38</sup> Richard D. Lewis, “When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures”, Third Edition. Nicholas Brealy International, Boston – London, 2006.





